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# FOOD, CULTURE & SOCIETY

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## The Changing Geography and Fortunes of Dublin's Haute Cuisine Restaurants, 1958–2008

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### Abstract

This paper considers the changing geography and fortunes of Dublin's haute cuisine restaurants over the last half century, placing them within both a national and international context. Ireland's place within the global story of food is discussed, and the paper illustrates links between Dublin and European and global trends. The paper shows that in the 1950s, Dublin could be seen as the gastronomic capital of the British Isles. The leading restaurateurs are briefly profiled, and the decline, stagnation, and gradual rebirth of Dublin's haute cuisine restaurants over the 1958–2008 period are charted and discussed. The paper combines data from the Central Statistics Office, the *Egon Ronay Guide*, and the *Michelin Guide*, with oral histories from leading chefs, waiters and restaurateurs to provide a robust account of the story of haute cuisine in Dublin restaurants for the last five decades.

**Keywords:** haute cuisine, Dublin restaurants, *Michelin Guide*, *Egon Ronay Guide*, oral history

### Introduction

When discussing haute cuisine, the words *Dublin* and *Ireland* do not immediately come to mind. Yet between 1901 and 1967, Dublin was home to one of the world's finest haute cuisine restaurants, Restaurant Jammet (Mac Con Iomaire 2005, 2006). Furthermore, in 1949, Pierre Rolland arrived in Dublin as chef de cuisine of The Russell Hotel, and under his leadership the restaurant also became world renowned (Mac Con Iomaire 2004). In the 1950s, these two Dublin establishments received awards from the American magazine *Holiday* for being among the

“outstanding restaurants in Europe.” The high standard of food and service in these restaurants was confirmed in 1963 when *The Egon Ronay Guide* first covered Ireland (see Table 1). By 1974, however, when the *Michelin Guide to Great Britain and Ireland* was first published, the only Dublin establishment to be recognized as outstanding and be awarded a star was The Russell Restaurant, which closed its doors that very year. It was not until 1989 that the *Michelin Guide* would again award a star to a Dublin restaurant, Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud. By 2008, six Dublin restaurants shared seven stars (Guilbaud’s was awarded two stars from 1996), and three Dublin restaurants were awarded a “Red M,” symbolizing excellent food and a reasonable price (Table 2). The year 2008 marked the end of a golden age for Dublin restaurants, as the global recession and banking crisis made trading conditions extremely difficult. This paper, drawing from the author’s doctoral research, provides a brief history of Dublin’s haute cuisine restaurants, and outlines the gradual decline, stagnation and subsequent resurgence of haute cuisine in Dublin restaurants over five decades from 1958 to 2008.

### Origins and Spread of French Haute Cuisine

In Europe, during the Middle Ages, the use of spices was one of the markers that separated the tables of the wealthy from the less well off. The development of sea routes to the Orient led to the wider availability of spices, and the French nobility gradually began to spurn their use. French classical cuisine was born with the publication of La Varenne’s *Le Cuisinier François* in 1651, and was refined further by the nouvelle cuisine writers of the eighteenth century, such as La Chapelle, Marin and Menon (Lehmann 1999: 278). These writers argued that the specific flavor of food should be highlighted rather than masked, and developed the use of stocks and sauces to capture the essence of individual ingredients, preferring the use of herbs such as parsley, thyme and bay leaf to the previously used spices of the Orient. The increased use of sugar, vegetables, new world foods and beverages, and the fashion for ices all occurred during this period. Two types of cuisine, never completely distinct or interchangeable, developed side by side: haute cuisine in the larger kitchens, and cuisine bourgeoise in the small kitchens of the prosperous classes (Wheaton 1983: 231). This use of new ingredients and flavor combinations and the development of new cooking techniques which interacted to give birth to haute cuisine originated in France, and above all, in Paris.

French haute cuisine in the public sphere originated in Paris during the latter half of the eighteenth century with the appearance of restaurants (Spang 2000: 2). This phenomenon was greatly boosted by the French Revolution when the number of restaurants increased dramatically (Mennell 1996: 141–2; Pitte 1999: 476). There were over one hundred restaurants in Paris before the Revolution, according to Pitte (1999: 476), rising to around six hundred under the Empire and to about three thousand during the Restoration. A number of factors differentiated these restaurants from taverns, inns and *tables d’hôte*. First, they provided private tables for customers; second, they offered a choice of individually priced dishes in the

form of a *carte* or bill of fare; and third, they offered food at times that suited the customer, not at one fixed time, as in the case of the *table d'hôte* (Brillat-Savarin 1994: 267). The diffusion of restaurants to London or Dublin was slow, primarily due to the abundance of gentlemen's clubs, which siphoned off much of the prospective clientele (Mennell 1996: 155). In Dublin, however, meals had been available to the public in the city's alehouses, taverns, inns and eating-houses for centuries; indeed, as Maxwell (1979: 26) notes, Dublin had been renowned for its taverns and ale-houses since Elizabethan times. These establishments served mostly good solid plain food such as steaks and chops, rather than the elite cuisine which was served by French male cooks in the homes of the aristocracy. Dublin's first French restaurant—the Café de Paris, attached to the Turkish baths in Lincoln Place—did not open until 1860. An advertisement for this new French restaurant in *The Irish Times* (December 10, 1860) shows it was targeting the aristocracy, nobility and gentry as its customers. Other early restaurants included The Burlington Restaurant and Oyster Saloons (1865–1901) on Andrew Street and The Red Bank Restaurant (1845–1969) on D'Olier Street, which was originally a tavern called Burton Bindon's. One of the trends evident from newspaper advertisements at the end of the nineteenth century was the opening of “ladies dining rooms” in Dublin restaurants. The pairing of César Ritz and Georges Auguste Escoffier are credited with making public dining for ladies fashionable in London around this time (Mac Con Iomaire 2009a).

Haute cuisine has been influenced by various influential writers/chefs and has experienced a number of paradigm shifts over the centuries, from La Varenne, Carême, Dubois and Escoffier, to Point, Bocuse, Guérard, Mosimann, Roux, Waters, Gagnaire, Adrià and Blumenthal. This paper uses the term *haute cuisine* to cover the evolving styles of elite cuisine produced and served in restaurants by professional staff from the Escoffier orthodoxy of the early twentieth century through the nouvelle cuisine movement of the 1970s and 1980s, to the molecular gastronomy movement of the early twenty-first century.

### **Influence of Foreign Chefs/Restaurateurs**

Analysis of the 1911 Census shows that the leading chefs, waiters and restaurateurs during the first decades of the century were predominantly foreign-born, and had trained in the leading restaurants, hotels and clubs of Europe. The dominance of German waiters in hotels of the caliber of The Shelbourne Hotel ended with the advent of the First World War. From this time on, Swiss chefs, waiters and managers began to dominate top catering positions in Dublin (Mac Con Iomaire 2008a).

The Burlington Restaurant was purchased by two French brothers, Michel and Francois Jammet, who reopened it as Dublin's most famous French restaurant—Restaurant Jammet—on Andrew Street in 1901. The restaurant moved to Nassau Street in 1927 where it remained, until its closure in 1967 (Mac Con Iomaire 2006). Haute cuisine was available in the dining rooms of the best hotels in Dublin (Gresham, Shelbourne, Metropole, Royal Hibernian) in the first half of the twentieth century. Restaurant Jammet remained the pre-eminent restaurant producing haute



FOOD,  
CULTURE &  
SOCIETY

VOLUME 14

ISSUE 4

DECEMBER 2011

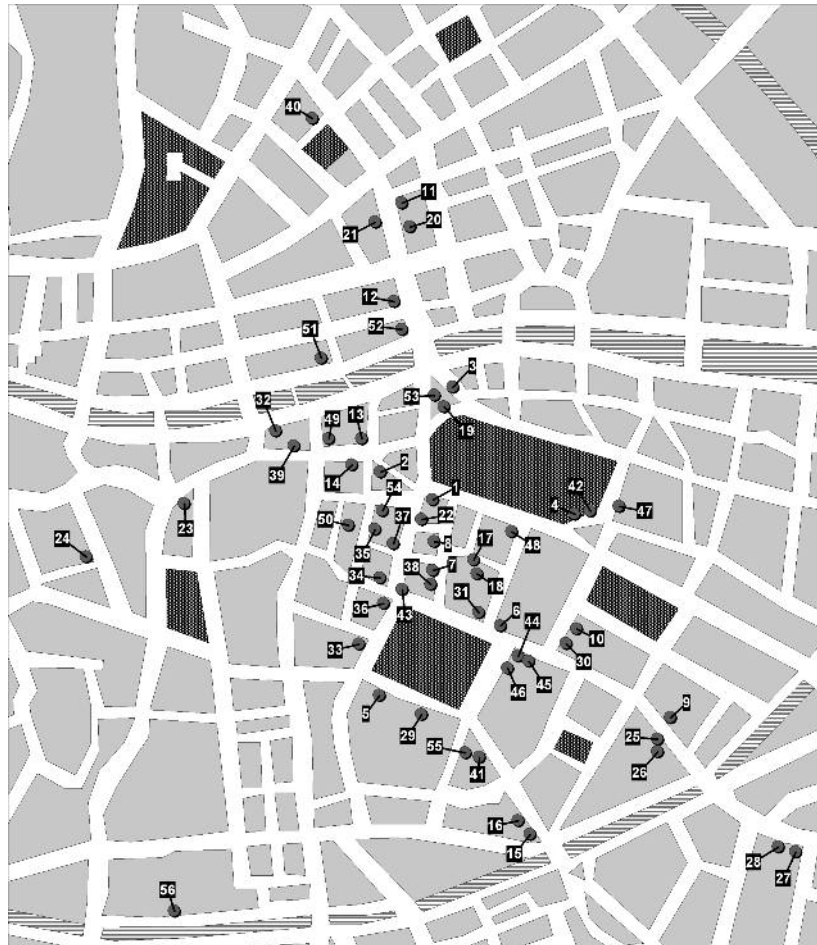
cuisine in Dublin and until the opening of The Russell, was also “the only restaurant in Dublin with an international reputation for its cuisine” (Graves 1949). Indeed, according to Lacoste, Jammet’s was the only place in the British Isles where one could eat well in the grand French tradition, “*A Dublin ... on trouve une cuisine digne de la grande tradition française*” (Lacoste 1947).

Along with the Jammet brothers, other European families such as the Geldofs, Oppermanns, Gygaxes and Bessons were also influential in developing the restaurant business in Dublin. Paul Besson came to Dublin from London in 1905 as manager of The Royal Hibernian Hotel on Dawson Street. Over the decades, Paul Besson, along with his son Kenneth and other members of his family, took control of The Royal Hibernian, The Russell Hotel, and The Bailey Restaurant on Duke Street. (For further detailed information on these families, see Mac Con Iomaire 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e). Locations of all haute cuisine restaurants are shown in Figure 1. During the first half of the twentieth century, elite restaurants were clustered around the Nassau Street/College Green/D’Olier Street area close to the river Liffey. The location of elite Dublin restaurants had changed by the end of the century to a “golden mile” spanning from the top of Grafton Street, along Stephen’s Green and down the business district of Baggot Street.

## Education

The beginnings of culinary education in Ireland lay in evening courses in (plain) cookery which were taught in Kevin Street Technical School from the late 1880s. Formal knowledge transfer of the French culinary canon was organized by the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee through their professional cookery and restaurant service classes. These courses, which had been set up in conjunction with Dublin’s leading chefs, waiters and restaurateurs, ran in the Parnell Square Vocational School from 1926. In 1941, they transferred to new purpose-built Cathal Brugha Street College, which was renamed the Dublin College of Catering in the 1950s. The Council for Education, Recruitment and Training for the Hotel Industry (CERT) was set up in 1963 as a national body responsible for coordinating the education, recruitment and training of staff for the hotel, catering and tourism industries (Coolahan 2002: 285). Corr (1987: 73–8) charts the background and history of CERT, noting that it was originally run under the auspices of Bord Fáilte and was aimed exclusively at the hotel industry. In 1974, it began providing education, recruitment and training for the entire catering sector. In 1977, new management at CERT gave the organization a fresh impetus; courses were streamlined, new services were offered with the help of European Economic Community (EEC) funds, and in 1982 the National Craft Curriculum Certification Board was established. This enabled catering education in Ireland to set its own standards, establish its own criteria and award its own certificates, roles which previously had been carried out primarily by the City & Guilds of London (Corr 1987: 78).

One of the major developments in Irish culinary education was the introduction of the City & Guilds advanced master chef courses (706/3) in both kitchen/larder,



**Fig 1:** Map of Restaurants in Dublin City Center.

(1) Restaurant Jammet; (2) Burlington Restaurant; (3) The Red Bank; (4) Cafe de Paris; (5) The Russell Hotel; (6) The Shelbourne Hotel; (7) The Royal Hibernian Hotel; (8) The Bailey; (9) Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud (1981–1997); (10) The Merion Hotel/Guilbaud's; (11) The Gresham Hotel; (12) The Metropole; (13) Jury's Hotel Dame Street; (14) Moira Hotel; (15) Snaffles; (16) Golden Orient/Tandoori Rooms; (17) The Soup Bowl; (18) Polo One/One Pico; (19) Ostinelli's; (20) Luna; (21) Savoy; (22) Mitchells/McDonald's; (23) The Lord Edward; (24) The Old Dublin; (25) The Celtic Mews; (26) L'Ecrivain; (27) Le Coq Hardi; (28) Bon Appetit Ballsbridge; (29) The Commons; (30) Lloyd's/Pearl Brasserie; (31) Bruno's/Town Bar & Grill; (32) The Clarence Hotel/The Tea Rooms; (33) White's on the Green; (34) Shay Beano's; (35) Peacock Alley; (36) Fitzwilliam Hotel/Peacock Alley/Thornton's; (37) Cooke's Cafe; (38) La Stampa; (39) Les Freres Jacques; (40) Chapter One; (41) Morel's at Stephen Hall; (42) Bernardo's; (43) Peploes; (44) Bang Cafe; (45) Unicorn; (46) Residence; (47) Bentley's; (48) Jacob's Ladder; (49) Mermaid Cafe; (50) La Maison de Gourmet; (51) The Winding Stairs; (52) Green Rooster; (53) Paradiso; (54) Trocadero; (55) Hotel Conrad; (56) Thornton's (1995–2000)



FOOD,  
CULTURE  
&  
SOCIETY

VOLUME 14

ISSUE 4

DECEMBER 2011

and in pastry, which began in 1977. The 706/3 program was taught in the Dublin College of Catering by Jimmy Kilbride, whose students became the future teachers, entrepreneurs and leaders in culinary matters in Ireland in the last decades of the twentieth century. The 706/3 syllabus was strongly based on the Escoffier tradition, using textbooks such as *Le Guide Culinaire*, *Larousse Gastronomique*, *Le Répertoire de la Cuisine*, and *The Larder Chef*. Kilbride, however, also invited sociologists, food writers, and historians to speak and dine with the students at the end of class, and always ensured the students matched a suitable wine with the food served. Not only did he engender a love of learning in his students, but he also gave Irish chefs the confidence to compete at the world-class level. In an interview conducted in 2003, Kilbride recalled being extremely impressed with the quality, commitment, interest and dedication of the Irish chefs who attended the course, noting that the first year they went to Hotelympia (an international culinary competition held in London) they won numerous awards.<sup>1</sup> Noel Cullen (2001) credits Kilbride with giving him pride as a chef and credits the advanced cookery program as having made a significant contribution in raising the consciousness and self-awareness of Irish chefs. Kevin Thornton has likewise credited Kilbride with opening his mind to the history of food and instilling him with confidence in his own ability; he has also suggested that Kilbride was the only person he was ever nervous cooking for, saying that “it was like cooking for the master” when his former mentor would come for a meal at the Wine Epergne restaurant.<sup>2</sup>

The Dublin College of Catering, which became part of the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), remained the flagship of catering education in Ireland. In 1986, a full-time certificate in culinary arts was developed, focusing on catering for health, and, after some controversy, a primary degree in culinary arts was sanctioned by the Department of Education in 1999 (Duff *et al.* 2000: 28). Some industry organizations tried to block the new program, fearing that it might affect the regular supply of inexpensive labor offered by the apprenticeship system. The availability of an honors degree in culinary arts, however, introduced a better educated cohort of students to the industry. By 2008, Irish graduates from the honors degree were working in many of the leading restaurants in Ireland and across the world (Mac Con Iomaire 2008b).

### Golden Age of Haute Cuisine in Dublin

The 1947–1974 period can be viewed as a “golden age” of haute cuisine in Dublin, as more award-winning world-class restaurants traded in Dublin during this period than at any other time in history. In the late 1940s, The Red Bank Restaurant reopened as a fine dining restaurant with a French head chef producing haute cuisine. Newspaper reports of gastronomic dinners held by the Irish branch of André L. Simon’s Food and Wine Society provide evidence of the growing interest in haute cuisine during this period. Both The Russell Restaurant and Restaurant Jammet received awards from the American magazine *Holiday* in the 1950s for being “outstanding restaurants in Europe.” Eight London restaurants and one each in Inverness and in Edinburgh were the only other award winners in the British

Isles. Comparative analysis of the *Holiday* magazine awards with the populations of Dublin, London and Scotland in the 1950s suggests that, on a per capita basis, Dublin was the gastronomic capital of the British Isles. Further evidence of Dublin restaurants' status as culinary leaders becomes evident when the *Egon Ronay Guide* first covered Ireland in 1963. Ronay (1965) suggested that The Russell Restaurant "must rank amongst the best in the world." The majority of the award-winning Dublin restaurants produced a labor-intensive form of haute cuisine that had been codified by Escoffier, which was silver served by large teams of waiters in elegant dining rooms. In the early 1950s, an agreement between Ken Besson and the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (IT&GWU) allowed foreign-born chefs and waiters to work in Ireland in return for Irish apprentices being indentured in the Russell and Royal Hibernian Hotels under the guidance of chefs Pierre Rolland and Roger Noblet. Under Rolland, The Russell Hotel kitchen became a training ground for generations of Irish chefs (Figure 2). In 1954, *The Irish Hotelier* described Rolland as one of the top ten chefs in France in the late 1940s (Anon 1954).

By the middle of the twentieth century, the earlier integration of international expertise was being questioned. In the late 1950s and early 1960s there were fewer foreign chefs or waiters working in Dublin, having been replaced by foreign-trained



**Fig 2:** Pierre Rolland with the Russell Hotel Kitchen Brigade c.1958.

*Front row (left to right):* Nicky O'Neill, Jackie Needham, un-named French chef, Monsieur Petrel (general manager), Pierre Rolland (head chef), Monsieur Maurice (restaurant manager), Roger Noblet (sous chef), Henri Rolland, Arthur McGee. *Middle row (left to right):* Un-named trainee manager, Brian Loughrey, Charlie O'Neill, Brendan Egan, Johnny Kilbride, Louis Corrigan, un-named trainee manager. *Back row (left to right):* Michael (kitchen porter), un-named commis, commis Mansfield, Eamon (Ned) Ingram, Mary (vegetable maid).



FOOD,  
CULTURE  
&  
SOCIETY

VOLUME 14

ISSUE 4

DECEMBER 2011



Irish chefs and waiters. The catering branch of the IT&GWU, during this period, strongly opposed the employment of foreign staff. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some Irish chefs and waiters were pressured to take senior positions, in order to exclude suitable foreign-born candidates.<sup>3,4</sup> Two Irish chefs, Vincent Dowling in Restaurant Jammet, and Joe Collins in Jury's Hotel, Dame Street, were sent abroad—to Paris and Switzerland—for training before returning to become chef de cuisine in their respective restaurants. The move from French to Irish head chefs, combined with a new Irish culinary aesthetic inspired by An Tóstal, may have

**Table 1:** Dublin Restaurants Awarded Stars in the *Egon Ronay Guide*, 1963–1989

Restaurant	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1973	1974	1975	1983	1984	1985	1987	1989
The Russell Hotel	3*	3*	3*	3*	2*	2*	2*	2*	2*	2*	2*	2*	1*						
The Royal Hibernian Lafayette Restaurant	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*						
The Shelbourne Hotel Restaurant	1*	1*																	
Intercontinental Hotel Embassy Restaurant		1*	1*	1*															
Jammet's Restaurant	2*	2*	1*	1*	1*														
The Red Bank Restaurant	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*														
Snaffles Restaurant											1*	1*	1*						
The Soup Bowl											1*	1*	1*						
The Gresham Hotel	1*																		
Haddington House	1*	1*	1*																
Restaurant Rolland														1*					
Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud															1*	1*	1*	1*	
The Park Restaurant																			1*

Note: No stars were awarded between 1976 and 1982

influenced the change in listings of certain Dublin restaurants in the 1965 *Egon Ronay Guide* from French cuisine to Franco-Irish cuisine. Restaurants awarded stars in the Egon Ronay Guide are shown in Table 1.

French classical cuisine was dominant in the Shelbourne, Gresham and Moira Hotels, although the *Egon Ronay Guide* noted a drop in the standard of food in some Dublin hotels by the mid-1960s. The arrival of the Swiss master chef, Willy Widmer, helped improve the standard of food in Jury's Hotel, Dame Street, during the 1960s, and the opening of The Intercontinental Hotel in Ballsbridge in 1963 brought several foreign-born chefs to Dublin. Both hotels became nurseries for future culinary talent, although Jim Bowe has suggested that standards dropped again when the foreign chefs left,<sup>5</sup> which is also reflected in the *Egon Ronay Guides*. Indeed, according to Bowe, the owners began to focus more on making a profit than on maintaining standards. A new phenomenon appeared towards the end of the 1960s, with enthusiastic amateurs opening of restaurants such as Snaffles on Leeson Street (Nicholas Tinne) and The Soup Bowl in Molesworth Lane (Peter Powrie). This reflects a similar trend which occurred slightly earlier in England (Driver 1983).

### **Decline of Haute Cuisine (1967–1974)**

A number of factors led to the demise of the traditional Escoffier style haute cuisine in Dublin restaurants by the early 1970s. Political and economic factors such as the Dublin bombings, the OPEC oil crisis, and banking strikes, all played some part in the demise. Another factor that, according to O'Sullivan and O'Neill (1999: 161), "caused a far greater setback to the [Shelbourne] hotel's business than the fuel crisis or the political troubles" was the revival of "wealth tax" by the Fine Gael political party in their 1973 election manifesto, resulting in a mass exodus of landed gentry from Ireland. O'Sullivan and O'Neill suggest that The Shelbourne Hotel witnessed an instant 20 per cent drop in business in 1973, with The Russell Hotel also affected, closing in 1974.

The growing trend towards suburban living and the rising importance of car parking were two reasons given for the closure of Restaurant Jammet in 1967.<sup>6</sup> A dramatic rise in suburban living is evident from the 1966 and 1971 census reports. The appearance of a growing number of suburban restaurants such as the Mirabeau, Goat Grill, Shangri la, Guinea Pig, Sutton House and The King Sitric during the 1970s reflects this trend. Ruth McManus (2001) has shown that a similar trend had occurred with Dublin hotels in the 1960s and 1970s. The rise of suburban restaurants is shown in Figure 3.

The success of family-owned restaurants like Jammet and The Red Bank also depended on the next generation of the family showing an interest in the business. None of the Montgomery family who owned The Red Bank Restaurant pursued the business, and the restaurant closed in 1969.<sup>7</sup> Following the closure of the Nassau Street restaurant in 1967, Patrick Jammet intended to reopen a Jammet Hotel and Restaurant on Shelbourne Road (a residential area) but was refused planning permission. John Howard has also suggested that many of the restaurants serving the Escoffier style haute cuisine were overstaffed,<sup>8</sup> and by

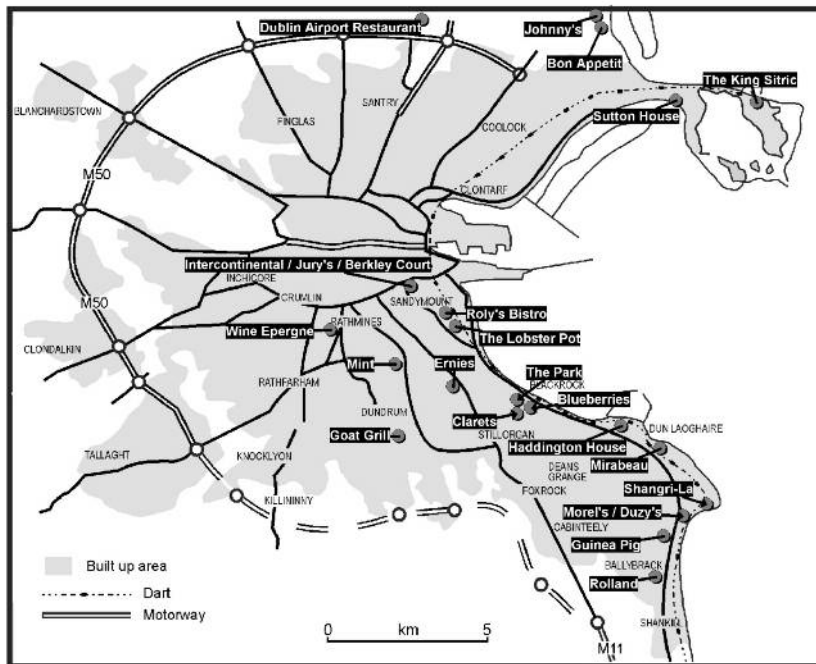


FOOD,  
CULTURE  
&  
SOCIETY

VOLUME 14

ISSUE 4

DECEMBER 2011



**Fig 3:** Map of Suburban Restaurants in Dublin.

the early 1970s no longer financially viable. He argues that the buildings that housed these restaurants and hotels had become more valuable when redeveloped for other use, particularly as offices, following Ireland's entry into the EEC. Ireland's membership of the European community eventually led to more cross-cultural exchanges in food and beverages, but the initial joining in the early 1970s coincided with a decline rather than a rise in haute cuisine restaurants in Dublin.

The growth of foreign travel and television resulted in an increasing popularity of Indian, Italian and Chinese restaurants such as the Golden Orient, Ostinelli's, Luna and Bernardo's, as well as moderately priced restaurants in Dublin serving an international style of food, including The Green Rooster, Paradiso and Trocadero. Evidence of American trends for fast, reasonably priced food, became evident in establishments such as The Savoy Grill and in Jury's Coffee Dock. Many of the buildings that had housed restaurants in which haute cuisine had been served during the first six decades of the century became fast food outlets during the 1970s and 1980s. McDonald's opened in the Grafton Street building that had housed Mitchell's Restaurant for over a hundred years. By 1974 in both London and France, the style of haute cuisine was beginning to move towards what would later be described as nouvelle cuisine. Plate service began to replace silver service, reducing waiters from practitioners of the table arts to plate carriers.

## Stagnation of Haute Cuisine (1974–1986)

Dublin's golden age of haute cuisine had ended with the closure of Restaurant Jammet (1967), The Red Bank Restaurant (1969) and The Russell Hotel (1974). With the closure of The Russell Hotel, the Royal Hibernian Hotel assumed the mantle of Dublin's last bastion of Escoffier style haute cuisine. A marker of their new status was that they inherited the catering contract for the Department of Foreign Affairs from The Russell—supplying elaborate dinners for all visiting dignitaries. The Royal Hibernian produced a cadre of professionally trained chefs and managers such as Michael Governey who went on to open the Berkley Court Hotel, Ballsbridge, and later the Hotel Conrad, Earlsfort Terrace, and Tommy Crean who opened The Lobster Pot in Ballsbridge. The Royal Hibernian closed in 1982 and was redeveloped as offices and a shopping arcade.

Restaurants such as Snaffles and The Soup Bowl, opened by enthusiastic amateurs, became the new venues for Dublin gourmards. Some of the kitchen and dining room staff from the recently closed restaurants found positions in these new establishments and in restaurants such as The Lord Edward, The Old Dublin, and in country house hotels such as Ashford Castle, which had become the center of haute cuisine in Ireland in the 1970s and early 1980s. Ken Wade, head chef in Ashford Castle, had trained in The Russell Hotel and in turn trained young chefs such as Colin O'Daly who became influential in the resurgence of haute cuisine in Dublin in the 1980s. Declan Ryan of Arbutus Lodge in Cork also trained in The Russell Hotel and one of his protégés, Michael Clifford, was also involved in the story of haute cuisine in Dublin in the 1980s.

Fine dining restaurants in Dublin did not totally disappear during the 1970s and 1980s, but there was a distinctive decline in restaurants with an international reputation. Restaurants such as The Lord Edward (run by ex-Red Bank chefs and waiters), and The Celtic Mews, run by Joe Gray (ex-Jury's Dame Street) provided consistent cuisine bourgeoise. The real growth area in good dining, both in Dublin and elsewhere in Europe, at this time was the emergence of restaurants run by chef-proprietors. In Dublin, these chef-proprietors opened their restaurants mostly in the suburbs, and embraced a less labor-intensive model of cooking and service.

## Growth of Nouvelle Cuisine

Pitte (1999: 479) argues that French cuisine changed after the Second World War in response to both the demise of the grand hotels and the rise of automotive tourism, which had begun earlier in the century, championed by the “prince of gastronomy” Curnonsky. Pitte suggests that wealthy Parisians' habit of breaking their journey from Paris to the Cote d'Azur by sampling the gastronomic delights of the regions through which they were traveling explains the success of Point, Dumaine, Thullier and their contemporaries. Fernand Point, whose restaurant La Pyramide is located in Vienne (Rhône Valley), is widely considered as the most influential chef in France in the postwar period because many past students—including Jean and Pierre Troisgros, Paul Bocuse, Louis



FOOD,  
CULTURE  
&  
SOCIETY

VOLUME 14

ISSUE 4

DECEMBER 2011

Outhier, François Bis, and Alain Chapel—were among the leaders of what became known as the nouvelle cuisine movement (Smith 1990: 43). A number of Irish chefs worked directly with Bocuse and the Troisgros brothers in Lyon and Roanne respectively.

Gault (1996: 123–7) claims that it was his manifesto published in October 1973 in the *Gault-Millau* magazine which unleashed the movement called *La Nouvelle Cuisine Française*. The nouvelle cuisine movement was rooted in the “*cuisine de marché*” of Point, which originated as a rebellion against the Escoffier orthodoxy, particularly as stultified in international hotel cuisine (Blake and Crewe 1978: 40; Mennell 1996: 164). A synopsis of Gault’s “ten commandments” of nouvelle cuisine includes reduced cooking time for fish, game, vegetables and pasta; smaller menus based on market fresh ingredients; invention of new dishes; embracing advanced technology; the aesthetics of simplicity; and a knowledge of dietetics. Mennell (1996: 164) points out that Gault and Millau forgot to include one characteristic common to most of the *nouveaux cuisiniers*: that they were mostly chef-proprietors of their own restaurants. Nouvelle cuisine, according to Gillespie (1994: 21), became the modern form of haute cuisine. He argues that unlike Escoffier’s classical French cuisine, systemization of nouvelle cuisine went against everything it stood for, namely innovation and experimentation. The lack of a codified repertoire for the new form of cuisine led, in the view of some, to its dilution.

### Rise of Chef-Proprietors

One of the first Dublin restaurants to be opened by a chef-proprietor was The King Sitric (Aidan McManus) in Howth. This was followed by The Mirabeau (Sean Kinsella) in Sandycove, Johnny’s (Johnny Opperman) in Malahide, Le Coq Hardi (John Howard) in Ballsbridge, The Guinea Pig (Mervyn Stewart) in Dalkey and Bon Appetit (Patsy McGuirk) in Ballsbridge, and Rolland (Henri Rolland) in Killiney—run by Pierre Rolland’s son. The most famous of these early chef-proprietor restaurants were the Mirabeau and Le Coq Hardi. (A full profile of the above restaurants is available in Mac Con Iomaire 2009a.) Some of the restaurants listed above shared many characteristics covered in Gault’s “ten commandments” of nouvelle cuisine, most particularly the use of fresh seasonal local produce. The lack of a codified repertoire makes it difficult to pinpoint who was serving nouvelle cuisine in Dublin, especially as trends were changing quite rapidly, particularly in the 1980s with influences coming from various ethnic and fusion cuisines.

Three restaurants, all of which opened in the 1980s, best represent the nouvelle cuisine movement in Dublin: Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud, The Park and White’s on the Green. Patrick Guilbaud, a French-born chef, had trained in the leading restaurants in Paris before moving to Manchester to learn English, eventually opening his own restaurant in Cheshire where one of his customers, Barton Kilcoyne, invited him to visit Dublin. Guilbaud recalls:

We went to Ireland on vacation in 1979 or 1980 and I said to Sally “I think this would be a very nice place to live.” Anyhow, it is very funny because the 1970s

and early 1980s in England, it was booming because [of] Margaret Thatcher, and I didn't realise that Ireland would not be following things, and I was very confident. Barton sold me the site on Baggot Street and we built on it. Also, Barton had introduced me to a fantastic man called Arthur Gibney who was an architect and I spoke to Arthur and said that if I come to Ireland I want you to design a restaurant for me and I do not want a restaurant which is going to be stuffy, I want space, I want you to create me a space where people are going to be comfortable. At the time I never thought it was going to be a Michelin star restaurant. My aim was to open a restaurant which I would like to go and eat in. That was my aim, I always felt that the goal in a restaurant was to buy the best ingredients you can and then cook them as simple as possible, to make them interesting for the customer to eat. And everything evolved around that, we built up a reputation around these things.<sup>9</sup>

A description of Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud in *The Irish Times* reads "the restaurant is bright and elegant with French staff serving French food" (Foley 1982:7). The restaurant did not enjoy immediate commercial success; it took a while for the Irish clientele to become accustomed to the small portions and *la nouvelle cuisine d'Irlande* that Guilbaud was serving (Figure 4). The restaurant did, however, receive critical acclaim, being awarded an *Egon Ronay* star and a recommendation from *The Good Food Guide* in 1983, and a Bord Fáilte award in 1984 (*Irish Times* 1983; Foley 1984 7). Aidan McManus dined in Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud within weeks of its opening and was shocked "that the barrier had been raised so high."<sup>10</sup>

The early 1980s proved to be a difficult time for Irish restaurateurs due to a combination of general economic conditions and fiscal changes made by the government. The reduction and later abolition of tax relief on business entertainment in the early 1980s particularly affected restaurants' lunchtime trade. The 25 percent rate of VAT on meals, combined with high levels of personal income tax, and high levels of interest on loans made running a restaurant in Ireland a precarious venture. Many young Irish chefs and waiters emigrated during this



FOOD,  
& CULTURE  
SOCIETY

VOLUME 14

ISSUE 4

DECEMBER 2011

LA NOUVELLE CUISINE  
d'IRLANDE  
Freshest of food prepared in the  
French way.  
RESTAURANT  
PATRICK GUILBAUD  
46 James Place,  
Lower Baggot St., Dublin 2.  
Phone 764192/698696.

**Fig 4:** Advertisement for Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud.

Source: *The Irish Times*, June 23, 1983, p. 20.

period, some returning during the late 1980s and early 1990s with experience of nouvelle cuisine and fusion cuisine gained in the leading restaurants of London, Paris, New York and California. Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud ran into financial difficulties in the mid-1980s, but an investment by two wealthy clients cleared the restaurant's debts. Guilbaud suggests that having businessmen of the caliber of Lochlan Quinn and Martin Naughton believing enough in his business to become investors boosted his confidence.<sup>11</sup> Their trust was rewarded when the restaurant won its first Michelin star in 1989, the first Dublin Michelin star since the closure of The Russell Hotel in 1974. The restaurant was awarded two Michelin stars in 1996 and moved premises in 1997 with the opening of The Merrion Hotel, in which Quinn and Naughton were the main shareholders. Restaurants awarded Michelin stars and Red Ms are shown in Table 2.

For the last two decades of the twentieth century, Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud set the standard of haute cuisine that other restaurants emulated. Its kitchen and dining room also acted as nurseries for young talent, both Irish and foreign-born, with some restaurants even advertising their chef as "ex-Patrick Guilbaud's" as a marker of the high standard of food they served. One of the key reasons for the restaurant's continuous success is that the staff aims for the highest standards, and is regularly renewed. Guilbaud explains: "We have new blood coming in every eighteen months in the restaurant. We change our staff; we let them go after eighteen months, except the top guys. This brings new blood into the restaurant all the time."<sup>12</sup>

This continuous training of new staff at such high standards ensures a steady flow of staff for other restaurants in Dublin, such as Sebastian Masi who became head chef in The Commons and later chef-proprietor of Pearl Brasserie, Stefan Couzy who was Maitre d'hôtel in The Park and later co-owner in Duzy's, and Bruno Bertha who was a waiter in Le Coq Hardi and later owner of Bruno's. Ex-Guilbaud staff have been involved in most successful Dublin restaurants during the last twenty years (Mac Con Iomaire 2009a).

Colin O'Daly opened The Park, Blackrock, in 1985. He apprenticed as a chef in the famous Dublin Airport Restaurant and later worked in Ashford Castle. He then spent a number of years working in country house hotels, first as head chef in Renvyle House, in Connemara and then in Newport House in Mayo. He also worked in Dublin in The Tandoori Rooms, and The Clarence Hotel before becoming head chef in The Park Hotel in Kenmare, where he won a Michelin star in 1983 with a young energetic team of chefs, most of whom later spent some time working in The Park, Blackrock. O'Daly recalls that business was slow in the beginning but that a favorable review by Helen Lucy Burke in *The Sunday Tribune* transformed business, so that they were serving sixty meals a night and were booked out five weeks in advance.<sup>13</sup> O'Daly was awarded a star from the *Egon Ronay Guide* in 1989, which O'Byrne (1988) cites as evidence of culinary honors being awarded to an Irish chef who had never worked outside Ireland. O'Daly has since clarified this by stating that he attended a training course in French nouvelle cuisine with Robert Carrier in Hintlesham Hall in England.<sup>14</sup> Michelin awarded The Park a Red M in 1990, which was retained until the restaurant closed in 1992.

**Table 2:** Michelin Stars and Red Ms Awarded to Dublin Restaurants, 1974–2008

Restaurant	1974	1978	1979	1980	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
The Russell Hotel	*																							
Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud	* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *																							
The Commons	* * * * *																							
Thornton's	* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *																							
L'Ecrivain	M M M M * * * * *																							
Peacock Alley	* * * * *																							
Ernie's	M M M M M M M M																							
The Park	M M M																							
Clarets	M M																							
Rolland	M M M																							
Blueberry's	M M																							
Chapter One	M M M M M M * *																							
Jacobs Ladder	M M M M M M M																							
Lloyd's Brasserie	M M																							
Mermaid Café	M M M M																							
Morel's at Stephens Hall	M M M																							
Roly's Bistro	M M M																							
Duzy's Café (formerly Morels)	M M M M M M																							
La Maison de Gourmet	M M M M M M																							
Mint	*																							
Bon Appetit	*																							
Bang Café	M M M M M M																							
The Winding Stairs	M																							

Note: \* represent a Michelin star and M represents a red "M" award  
Source: Michelin Guides 1974–2008 (Derek Brown)



FOOD,  
CULTURE  
&  
SOCIETY

VOLUME 14

ISSUE 4

DECEMBER 2011



Within a year of The Park closing, O'Daly took the position of chef de cuisine in Roly's Bistro, which was an instant success, both from a financial and a gastronomic perspective.

White's on the Green was opened by Peter and Alicia White on December 7, 1985. The chef was Michael Clifford, who had trained in Arbutus Lodge in Cork and had won a Michelin star with the Ryan family in Cashel Palace, County Tipperary in 1982 and 1983. Clifford had spent twelve years working outside Ireland in Le Gavroche and The Waterside Inn in England, run by the Roux brothers, and Michel Rostang (a two Michelin-star Paris restaurant), as well as some time in both the Netherlands and West Germany (O'Byrne 1988). His food and presentation was influenced by the nouvelle cuisine that he had experienced abroad, and the restaurant became very popular. In 1988, however, Clifford left to open his own restaurant in Cork. White's on the Green was later purchased by new owners and the style of food was simplified. Giles O'Reilly, who worked as chef in both The Park and White's on the Green has described the late 1980s as a difficult time for fine dining restaurants in Dublin. Away from Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud and The Park, according to O'Reilly, the new interesting restaurant at that time was Shay Beano's, where Eamon Ó Catháin, an enthusiastic amateur in the style of Powrie and Tinne, cooked French provincial food.<sup>15</sup> The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the opening of exciting new restaurants such as The Wine Epergne (Kevin Thornton) and Clarets (Alan O'Reilly), which produced fine dining in difficult economic conditions. It also witnessed the opening of Dublin's first Japanese, Thai and Malaysian restaurants. It would be another few years, however, before other South-East Asian restaurants began to open in the city.

### Rebirth of Haute Cuisine, 1994–2008

Some Irish chefs such as Johnny Cooke (Polo One, Cooke's Café) worked in the United States and returned in the late 1980s with the latest Californian food ideas, influenced by Alice Waters and Jeremiah Towers. Other Irish chefs such as Kevin Thornton (The Wine Epergne, Thorntons), Michael Martin (La Stampa, The Tea Rooms), Shay Kirwan (The Commons), Paul Cartwright (Roly's Bistro), Paul Flynn (La Stampa, The Tannery), James Carberry (ESB, DIT), John Dunne (Les Freres Jacques, The Park, Duzy's) and Conrad Gallagher (Morels, Peacock Alley, Christopher's, Mango Toast) returned to Dublin having worked in the kitchens of Michelin-starred chefs such as Albert and Michel Roux, Nico Ladenis, Pierre Kaufman, Shaun Hill, John Burton-Race, Raymond Blanc and Anton Edelman in England, and with Paul Bocuse, Jean and Pierre Troisgros, Georges Blanc and Alain Ducasse in France, some of whom have been previously discussed. These returning Irish chefs, in turn, trained the current generation of Irish chefs in the latest techniques of haute cuisine which remained firmly rooted in the French culinary canon.

The 1990s was an exciting time for Dublin restaurants, particularly the latter half of the decade. McKenna (1996) reported that Ireland had the most dynamic cuisine in any European country, where in the last decade "a vibrant almost

unlikely style of cooking has emerged.” The real growth in haute cuisine did not become apparent until 1994 when The Commons on Stephen’s Green was awarded a Michelin star and both Ernies (Ernie Evans) in Donnybrook and Clarets (Alan O’Reilly) in Blackrock were awarded Red Ms. Factors influencing this new dynamism included the rising wealth of Irish citizens due to the Celtic Tiger phenomenon, which made dining in restaurants a regular pastime rather than an occasional treat, and also the changing tastes of the Irish public, who were more widely traveled than any previous Irish generation. In 1996, the year Michelin awarded Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud two stars, Thornton’s Restaurant in Portobello received its first star. In 1998, another Michelin star was awarded to Conrad Gallagher’s Peacock Alley in South Anne Street, which moved to The Fitzwilliam Hotel on Stephen’s Green the following year. By 1999, the chief executive of the Restaurant Association of Ireland (RAI) declared “we have a dining culture now, which we never did before” (Holmquist 1999). This sudden growth in the number of restaurants produced what CERT called “an acute skills shortage,” and restaurateurs relied on an increasing number of immigrant workers to staff their kitchens and dining rooms. In 2000, Dublin restaurants were awarded four Michelin stars and eight Red Ms, compared with only two Michelin stars awarded outside Dublin in the Republic of Ireland; with a further two stars in Northern Ireland. Dublin, once again, had become the center of haute cuisine in Ireland and a second “golden age” was emerging.

In 2001, Kevin Thornton became the first native Irish chef to be awarded two Michelin stars. In the first years of the new Millennium, Michelin stars were awarded to l’Ecrivain (Derry Clarke) on Baggot Street, and Chapter One (Ross Lewis) in Parnell Square, which had held Red Ms from the mid-1990s. Lorcan Cribben returned from working in The Ivy in London to win a Michelin Red M in three different Dublin restaurants in the last decade: Lloyd’s Brasserie, Morel’s at Stephen’s Hall, and Bang Café. In 2008, two further Michelin stars were awarded to Bon Appetit (Oliver Dunne) in Malahide, and Mint (Dylan McGrath) in Ranelagh. Both Dunne and McGrath had worked in the leading Dublin restaurants during the late 1990s and then honed their skills in England with chefs such as Gary Rhodes, Gordon Ramsay, John Burton Race and Tom Aikens before returning to Dublin and opening their own restaurants. By 2008, with the economic downturn looming, the location of restaurants was considered paramount to their continued success. Two new ventures, Bentley’s (Richard Corrigan) and Residence (Christian and Simon Stokes) opened in 2008, were located on St. Stephen’s Green, along what *Dubliner Magazine* called “the Golden Mile” (from Stephen’s Green to Baggot Street), with two other restaurateurs such as Barry Canny (Peplie’s) and Giorgio Casari (The Unicorn) planning new restaurants in the immediate vicinity. Dylan McGrath, Gordon Ramsay and Japanese chef Nobu Matsuhisa were also linked with opening restaurants along the “Golden Mile” (Wynne-Jones 2008).



FOOD,  
CULTURE &  
SOCIETY

VOLUME 14

ISSUE 4

DECEMBER 2011

## Conclusion

This paper has discussed the changing geography and fortunes of Dublin restaurants over the half century 1958–2008. During the mid-1950s, Dublin could be considered the gastronomic capital of the British Isles. This status was based principally on two exceptional French restaurants, Restaurant Jammet and The Russell Restaurant, which were run by French chefs and managers and became training grounds for generations of Irish culinary professionals. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the earlier integration of international expertise was being questioned, with unions pushing for senior positions to be filled by Irish chefs and waiters. The paper explored how European trends in food and dining influenced changes in eating patterns in Ireland, particularly the rise of nouvelle cuisine and the growth of restaurants run by chef-proprietors. Many of these new restaurants opened in the Dublin suburbs, mirroring a similar move away from the city center previously discussed by McManus (2001) in relation to Dublin hotels. However, by the dawn of the new millennium, a “Golden Mile” of prime location for Dublin restaurants existed, spanning from St. Stephen’s Green to Baggot Street Bridge. Foreign chefs and restaurateurs remained important to the story of Dublin restaurants, with Patrick Guilbaud considered to be the most influential in the last quarter century. Most successful Dublin restaurants today can trace some link to Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud.

[TX]The phenomenon of the Celtic Tiger witnessed dining out in Dublin restaurants becoming a regular pastime rather than an occasional treat among the Irish public. In 1996, Kevin Thornton was awarded his first Michelin star, and in 2001 became the first native Irish chef to be awarded two Michelin stars. A new rise in Irish confidence was evident in the culinary sphere as in many others. A bachelor’s degree in culinary arts commenced in the Dublin Institute of Technology in 1999. That same year, the chief executive of the RAI declared that “we have a dining culture now, which we never had before.” The growing confidence among Irish culinarians is evident in the fact that by 2008, apart from Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud, the remaining five Dublin restaurants awarded Michelin stars, and two of the three establishments awarded Red Ms had Irish head chefs, most of which were also chef-proprietors. With such rising indigenous talent, that is globally aware, the evolving future of Dublin restaurants appears promising.

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### Notes

- 1 Interview with Jimmy Kilbride, Drumcondra, October 8, 2003.
- 2 Interview with Kevin Thornton, Thorntons Restaurant, August 12, 2008.
- 3 Interview with Christy Sands, Dublin Institute of Technology, June 5, 2003.
- 4 Interview with Arthur McGee, Monkstown, January 6, 2004.
- 5 Interview with Jim Bowe, Blackrock, April 30, 2008.
- 6 Interview with Róisín Hood, Enniskerry, January 18, 2006.
- 7 Interview with Tommy Smith, Lord Edward Restaurant, July 20, 2007.
- 8 Interview with John Howard, Foxrock, August 12, 2008.
- 9 Interview with Patrick Guilbaud, Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud, February 20, 2008.
- 10 Telephone interview with Aidan McManus, August 28, 2008.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Interview with Colin O'Daly, Dublin, January 24, 2008.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Interview with Giles O'Reilly, Rialto, May 19, 2008.

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FOOD,  
CULTURE  
&  
SOCIETY

VOLUME 14

ISSUE 4

DECEMBER 2011

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